

XXXII.—*On the Wild Cattle of Chillingham Park.* By L. HINDMARSH, Esq., of Alnwick*.

THE history of every country is one of change. This applies not only to man and his social relations, but to everything animate and inanimate. In some localities the sea has become dry land; in others, the soil which once flourished with vegetation has become the bed of the ocean. Sterile wastes have been transmuted into fertile plains, and dense forests into cultivated fields; and many of those animals which once roamed through them in ferocious independence are swept away, and are only found in those historic records which nature has preserved in her great museum of fossil remains. The rapid progress of population and culture has accelerated the depopulation of wild animals, and within a period not very remote, has rid this country of many of its ferocious inhabitants. Bears, which formerly infested this island, were extirpated at a comparatively early period; yet there is evidence of their existence in Scotland so late as the year 1057, when a Gordon, in reward for his prowess in killing one, was directed by the king to carry three bears' heads upon his banner. After them the wild boar and wolf were finally exterminated. Of the latter, one was however destroyed in Scotland so late as 1680, and in Ireland some were found even so far down as 1710. Of the wild ox it is probable that one remnant at least survives in the wild cattle of Chillingham Park, Northumberland, the property of the Earl of Tankerville. Their origin, character, and habits form the subject of the present inquiry.

In promotion of this object we have been most obligingly favoured by their present noble and accomplished proprietor with the following very interesting account of them, which needs no further preface to its introduction in this place. The following is an exact copy.

“ Sir,

“ Grosvenor Square, June 8, 1838.

“ Some time since I promised to put down upon paper whatever I knew as to the origin, or thought most deserving of notice in respect to the habits and peculiarities of the wild cattle at Chillingham. I now proceed to redeem my promise, begging your pardon for the delay.

* Read before the late Meeting of the British Association at Newcastle, and communicated by the Author.

“ In the first place I must premise that our information as to their origin is very scanty. All that we know or believe in respect to it rests in great measure on conjecture, supported, however, by certain facts and reasonings which lead us to believe in their ancient origin, not so much from any direct evidence, as from the improbability of any hypothesis ascribing to them a more recent date. I remember an old gardener of the name of Moscrop, who died many years ago, at the age of perhaps 80 or more, who used to tell of what his father had told him as happening to him when a boy, relative to these wild cattle, which were then spoken of as wild cattle, and with the same sort of curiosity as exists with respect to them at the present day.

“ In my father and grandfather’s time we know that the same obscurity as to their origin prevailed ; and if we suppose (as no doubt was the case) that there were old persons in their time capable of carrying back their recollections to the generation still antecedent to them, this enables us at once to look back to a pretty considerable period, during which no greater knowledge existed as to their origin than at the present time. It is fair, however, to say, that I know of no document in which they are mentioned at any early period. Any reasoning, however, that might be built on their not being so noticed would equally apply to the want of evidence of that which would be more easily remembered or recollected,—the fact of their recent introduction.

“ The probability is that they were the ancient breed of the island, inclosed long since within the boundary of the park.

“ Sir Walter Scott, rather poetically, supposes that they are the descendants of those which inhabited the great Caledonian forest extending from the Tweed to Glasgow, at the two extremities of which, namely at Chillingham and Hamilton, they are found. His lines in the ballad ‘ Cadyon Castle,’ describe them pretty accurately at the present day :

‘ Mightiest of all the beasts of chase,
That roam in woody Caledon,
Crushing the forest in his race,
The mountain bull comes thundering on.
‘ Fierce on the hunter’s quiver’d band
He rolls his eye of swarthy glow,
Spurns with black hoof and horns the sand,
And tosses high his mane of snow.’

I must observe, however, that those of Hamilton, if ever they were of the same breed, have much degenerated.

“ The park of Chillingham is a very ancient one. By a copy of

the endowment of the vicarage extracted from the records at Durham, and referring to a period certainly as early as the reign of King John, about which time, viz. 1220 or thereabouts, the church of Chillingham was built, the vicar of Chillingham was, by an agreement with Robert De Muschamp, to be allowed as much timber as he wanted for repairs, of the best oak, out of the Great Wood (*Magno Bosco*) of Chillingham, the remains of which were extant in the time of my grandfather. The more ancient part of the castle also appears to have been built in the next reign, that of Henry III., since which it has been held without interruption by the family of Grey. At what period or by what process the park became inclosed, it is impossible to say; but as it was closely bounded by the domains of the Percies on the one side and by the Hibburnes on the other (the latter of whom had been seated there since the time of King John); and as the chief branch of the Greys always made Chillingham their principal residence until it passed into the hands of Lord Ossulston, by his marriage with the daughter and heiress of Ford Lord Grey, it is reasonable to suppose, that in order to secure their cattle, wild and tame, they had recourse to an inclosure, probably at an early period.

“ It is said that there are some other places in which a similar breed is found,—Lynn Park, in Cheshire; Hamilton (as I before mentioned); and Chartley Park (Lord Ferrers).

“ The first I have not seen, but they are described as of a different colour, and different in every respect. Those at Hamilton, or rather Chatelherault, I have seen, and they in no degree resemble those at Chillingham. They have no beauty, no marks of high breeding, no wild habits, being kept, when I saw them, in a sort of paddock; and I could hear no history or tradition about them which entitled them to be called wild cattle. Those at Chartley park, on the contrary, closely resemble ours in every particular, in their colour,—with some small difference in the colour of their ears,—their size, general appearance, and, as well as I could collect, in their habits. This was a very ancient park, belonging formerly to Devereux Earl of Essex, who built the bridge over the Trent, to communicate with his chace at Cannock and Beaudesert, then belonging to him; and the belief is, that these cattle had been there from time immemorial.

“ With respect to their habits, it is probable that you will learn more from Cole, who has been park-keeper at Chillingham for many years, than from any information that I can give. I can mention, however, some particulars. They have, in the first place, pre-eminently all the characteristics of wild animals, with some peculiarities

that are sometimes very curious and amusing. They hide their young, feed in the night, basking or sleeping during the day; they are fierce when pressed, but, generally speaking, very timorous, moving off on the appearance of any one, even at a great distance. Yet this varies very much in different seasons of the year, and according to the manner in which they are approached. In summer I have been for several weeks at a time without getting a sight of them, they, on the slightest appearance of any one, retiring into a wood, which serves them as a sanctuary. On the other hand, in winter, when coming down for food into the inner park, and being in constant contact with people, they will let you almost come among them, particularly if on horseback. But then they have also a thousand peculiarities. They will be feeding sometimes quietly, when if any one appears suddenly near them, particularly coming down the wind, they will be struck with a sudden panic and gallop off, running one over the other, and never stopping till they get into their sanctuary. It is observable of them, as of red deer, that they have a peculiar faculty of taking advantage of the irregularities of the ground, so that on being disturbed, they may traverse the whole park and yet you hardly get a sight of them. Their usual mode of retreat is, to get up slowly, set off in a walk, then a trot, and seldom begin to gallop till they have put the ground between you and them in the manner that I have described.

“In form they are beautifully shaped, short legs, straight back, horns of a very fine texture, thin skin, so that some of the bulls appear of a cream-colour, and they have a peculiar cry, more like that of a wild beast than that of ordinary cattle. With all the marks of high breeding, they have also some of its defects: they are bad breeders, and are much subject to the rash, a complaint common to animals bred in and in, which is unquestionably the case with these as long as we have any record of them.

“When they come down into the lower part of the park, which they do at stated hours, they move like a regiment of cavalry, in single files, the bulls leading the van, as, in retreat, it is the bulls that bring up the rear.

“Lord Ossulston was witness to a curious way in which they took possession as it were of some new pasture recently laid open to them. It was in the evening about sunset. They began by lining the front of a small wood, which seemed quite alive with them, when all of a sudden they made a dash forward altogether in a line, and charging close by him across the plain, they then spread out, and after a little time began feeding.

“ Of their tenacity of life the following is an instance :—

“ An old bull being to be killed, one of the keepers had proceeded to separate him from the rest of the herd, which were feeding in the outer park. This the bull resenting, and having been frustrated in several attempts to join them by the keeper interposing (the latter doing it incautiously), the bull made a rush at him and got him down ; he then tossed him three several times, and afterwards knelt down upon him and broke in several of his ribs. There being no other person present but a boy, the only assistance that could be given him was by letting loose a deer-hound, belonging to Lord Ossulston, who immediately attacked the bull, and, by biting his heels, drew him off the man, and eventually saved his life. The bull, however, never left the keeper, but kept continually watching and returning to him, giving him a toss from time to time. In this state of things, and while the dog, with singular sagacity and courage, was holding the bull at bay, a messenger came up to the castle, when all the gentlemen came out with their rifles and commenced a fire upon the bull, principally by a steady good marksman from behind a fence, at the distance of 25 yards ; but it was not till six or seven balls had actually entered the head of the animal (one of them passing in at the eye) that he at last fell. During the whole time he never flinched nor changed his ground, merely shaking his head as he received the several shots.

“ Many more stories might be told of hair-breadth escapes, accidents of sundry kinds, and an endless variety of peculiar habits observable in these animals, as more or less in all animals existing in a wild state ; but I think I have recapitulated nearly all that my memory suggests to me as most deserving of notice, and will only add that if you continue in the intention of preparing a paper to be read before the approaching scientific assemblage at Newcastle on this subject, you are welcome to append this letter to it as containing all the information which I am able to give.

“ I have the pleasure, &c. &c.,

“ To L. Hindmarsh, Esq.”

“ TANKERVILLE.”

To this very interesting and graphic description little need be added, except a few particulars gathered from Mr. Cole, who has been park-keeper upwards of 30 years. At present there are about 80 in the herd, comprising 25 bulls, 40 cows, and 15 steers, of various ages ; and no sight can be more beautiful than they were in the month of June last, when we saw them retreating in regular order into their forest sanctuary.

Their perfect symmetry, pure white colour, and fine crescent horns, render them, when moving in a body, a very imposing object. The eyes, eye-lashes, and tips of the horns alone are black; the muzzle is brown, the inside of the ears red or brown, and all the rest of the animal white. Even the bulls have no manes, but only a little coarse hair upon the neck; and they fight for supremacy until a few of the most powerful subdue the others, who afterwards submit to the rule of superior physical strength. If, by accident, a bull gets separated from the herd for a day or two, his settled relation seems to be forgotten; for on his rejoining it a fight ensues, and the conflict continues until the previous amicable understanding is re-established. The cows generally commence breeding at three, and continue to breed for a few years. When they calve, they hide their young for a week or ten days, and repair to the place of concealment two or three times a day for the purpose of suckling them. Should any person happen to approach their hiding-place the calves clap their heads close to the ground and lie in form like a hare. The cows suckle their calves nine months. The late Mr. Baily of Chillingham relates that he chanced to find a hidden calf two days old, very lean and weak; but on stroking its head, it got up, pawed two or three times like an old bull, and bellowing loudly, retired a few steps, and then bolted at him with all its force. The attack was repeated; but Mr. Baily, aware of its intention, moved aside, and it missed him and fell with such force as to prevent its rising. Its cries had however alarmed the whole herd, which came to its rescue, and forced him to retreat. This fact affords a strong indication of the wildness of this breed being natural, and not the superinduced result of solitude and seclusion. They bear the winter well, but in severe weather will come into a fold to eat hay, although they will not taste turnips. They are seldom allowed to live more than 8 or 9 years, at which period they begin to go back. When slaughtered the steers are usually 6 years old and weigh about 5 cwts. The beef is finely marbled, but in taste scarcely distinguishable from that of the domestic ox when fed on grass. By taking the calves at a very early age and treating them gently, the present keeper succeeded in domesticating an ox and a cow. They became

as tame as domestic animals, and the ox fed as rapidly as a short-horned steer. He lived 18 years, and when at his best was computed at 8 cwt. 0 qrs. 14 lbs. The cow only lived 5 or 6 years. She gave little milk, but the quality was rich. She was crossed by a country bull; but her progeny very closely resembled herself, being entirely white, excepting the ears, which were brown, and the legs, which were mottled. In their wild state few die from disease, and in the present keeper's time only two from calving. Mr. Baily states that when any one happens to be wounded or has become weak and feeble through age or sickness, the rest of the herd set upon it and gore it to death. This characteristic is an additional and strong proof of their native wildness.

It is remarkable that during the 33 years Mr. Cole has been keeper he has perceived no alteration in their size or habits from in-breeding, and that at the present time they are equal in every point to what they were when he first knew them. About half a dozen, within that period, have had small brown or blue spots upon the cheeks and necks; but these, with any defective ones, were always destroyed.

Although Chartley appears to be the only place where wild cattle *similar* to those of Chillingham are *now* to be found, down to the middle and latter end of last century, there were some at Burton Constable in Yorkshire, and at Drumlanrig in Dumfries-shire, which corresponded to them in almost every respect. Those of Burton Constable (which were swept off by a distemper) alone differed from them in having the ears, muzzles, and tips of the tails black, whilst in their habits and native wildness they were exactly similar. Those of Drumlanrig are described in the following extract from a letter addressed by the clergyman of the place to the writer of this paper, under date of the 10th July of the present year. He says, "In what year the wild cattle came to Drumlanrig I have not been able to ascertain. The breed are described as being all white, with the exception of the ears and muzzle (which were black) and without manes. They went under the appellation of the wild Caledonian cattle." They were driven away about the year 1780.

Of the high antiquity of the Chillingham breed of wild cattle,

the facts and reasonings contained in the Earl of Tankerville's letter are sufficient proof. The testimony of the two Moscrop, connected with the contemporaries of the first Moscrop, would almost carry us back a period of 200 years, when their origin seemed to be veiled in the same obscurity as at present exists respecting it. To this must be added the negative proof derivable from the absence of all record of their introduction into the park; for had they been brought there in times in any degree modern, a circumstance so remarkable was almost sure to have been recorded and handed down in a place that has so long been the principal residence of a noble family. On the contrary supposition that they are the native inhabitants of the park; no such record was to be expected; for succeeding generations growing up with this familiar knowledge, were no more likely to register the circumstance than that the sun had risen and set every day during their lives. Their antiquity is *unquestionable*; and when we connect this fact with their natural wildness and characteristic purity, we can scarcely doubt that they are the genuine remains of the aboriginal cattle of the north of England or of Scotland. Of the ancient cattle of this district no historic record can be found sufficient to mark their character and peculiarities; but of the Caledonian wild cattle we find a very particular and curious account in Boethius, who was born in 1470, and published his 'Historia Scotorum' at Paris in 1526. From the edition of 1574, fol. 6, line 63, we extract the following passage:—

“Adjacet Argadiæ ac Lenno in mediterraneis ager Stirlingi et Monteth, inde haud procul ejusdem nominis oppidum Stirlingum cum fortissimo Castello, cui olim nomen fuit Monti doloroso. Hic initia olim fuere Calidoniæ sylvæ, manentibus videlicet veteribus adhuc nominibus Callendar et Caldar. Excurrens per Monteth et Erneuallem longo tractu ad Atholiam et Loquhabriam usque, gignere solet ea sylva boves candidissimos in formam leonis jubam ferentes, cætera mansuetis simillimos, verum adeo feros indomitosque atque humanum refugientes consortium, ut quas herbas, arboresque, aut frutices humana contrectatas manu senserint plurimos deinceps dies fugiant: capti autem arte quapiam (quod difficillimum est) mox paulo præ mœstitia moriantur. Quum vero sese peti

senserint, in obvium quencunque magno impetu irruentes eum prosternunt, non canes, non venabula, nec ferrum ullum metuunt.” And after narrating the wonderful deliverance of Robert Bruce from one of these wild bulls by the courage and prowess of a man who was, in grateful commemoration of the circumstance, afterwards named by the king Turnbull, he adds, “Cæterum quum tota olim sylva nasci ea solerent; in una tantum nunc ejus parte reperiuntur, quæ Cummernald appellatur, aliis gula humana ad interneccionem redactis.” This description is confirmed by Bishop Leslie in his ‘*De Origine, Moribus, et Rebus Gestis Scotorum,*’ published at Rome in 1578, 52 years after the work of Boethius. At page 18 of the edition of 1675, he says,—

“In Calidonia olim frequens erat sylvestris quidem bos, nunc vero rarior, qui colore candidissimo, jubam densam, ac demissam instar leonis gestat, truculentus, ac ferus ab humano genere abhorrens, ut quæcunque homines vel manibus contrectarint, vel halitu perflaverint, ab iis multos post dies omnino abstinerint Ejus carnes cartilaginosæ, sed saporis suavissimi. Erat is olim per illam vastissimam Calidoniæ sylvam frequens, sed humana ingluvie jam assumptus, tribus tantum locis est reliquus, Strivilingi, Cummernaldiæ, et Kin-carniæ.”

These passages are most important, not only for their very minute description of the wild Caledonian cattle, but for the light which they throw upon the cause of their almost total extermination. Even in the time of Boethius they had been reduced by an almost universal slaughter to a small remnant; and it has been stated that upon the dissolution of the monastic establishments of Scotland the few that remained were transferred to Drumlanrig.

On comparing the descriptions of the wild Caledonian cattle given by Boethius and Leslie with the previous account of the Chillingham breed at the present day, we cannot but be struck with their generally close correspondence. Bating a little hyperbole in the style of the old historians, the resemblance is complete in almost every point, excepting that the Chillingham cattle want the lion-like manes ascribed to the Caledonian race. This point alone seems to offer any difficulty in

the way of their complete identification ; and whether comparative confinement and in-breeding are sufficient to account for this difference in the Chillingham cattle must be matter of opinion. In other animals they are undoubtedly powerful agents of change and modification, and possibly they may in some measure have lessened the ruggedness of this species. Besides, without questioning the general accuracy of Boethius or Leslie, the characteristic style of the passages would seem fairly to lead us to interpret the statement respecting their leonic manes more by the rule of *poetic* than of exact zoological description. But if we admit (what can scarcely be doubted) that the wild cattle of Drumlanrig were the descendants of the ancient Caledonian breed, this sole obstacle vanishes ; for *they* had no manes, and their general resemblance to the Chillingham race is complete. It is true that in the colour of the ears there is a trifling difference, but this appears to be an occasional variety in the species ; for Bewick states that about 40 years ago some of those at Chillingham had black ears, that the keeper destroyed them, and that since that period this variation has not recurred. The identity of the Drumlanrig cattle with those described by Boethius being granted, that of the Chillingham breed can scarcely be denied.

Upon the whole, we are inclined to believe that the same species of wild cattle prevalent in Scotland had extended to the northern districts of England ; that in proportion as population and culture advanced, they became here, as in Scotland, the subjects of almost universal slaughter ; and that a few of those that escaped had found sanctuary in the great wood of Chillingham (as well as in some other ancient forests), where they escaped the fury of their destroyers. The only other tenable hypothesis is, that after the inclosure of the park at Chillingham, they had been brought from Scotland and located there as a relic of the ancient Caledonian cattle ; but the absence of all tradition and record upon the subject, and the circumstance of a similar breed having been found in places far removed from the Borders, render this supposition less probable than the former.

In speculations of this nature, when the data are so scanty, we can scarcely expect to arrive at absolute certainty, but suf-

ficient has we think been advanced to justify the hypothesis that these are the genuine remains of the ancient cattle of the country, and too much praise cannot be given to the public spirit of their present noble proprietor for his zealous care to preserve, pure and untainted, this interesting relic of the zoology of former times.

Alnwick, August 18, 1838.

NOTE.—The Earl of Tankerville, in writing to Mr. Children that he would most kindly send a skin and skull of the wild oxen of Chillingham to the British Museum collection, communicated the following interesting particulars, which we have taken the liberty of adding to Mr. Hindmarsh's paper :—

“I forgot to mention in my letter to Mr. Hindmarsh a curious circumstance with respect to the continuation of the breed of the wild cattle. Several years since, during the early part of the lifetime of my father, the bulls in the herd had been reduced to three; two of them fought and killed each other, and the third was discovered to be impotent; so that the means of preserving the breed depended on the accident of some of the cows producing a bull calf.”—J. E. GRAY.

XXXIII.—*On some new or little known Mammalia.* By JOHN EDWARD GRAY, F.R.S., Senior Assistant of the Zoological Department of the British Museum.

[With two Plates.]

CAPTAIN Clapperton and Colonel Denham, when they returned from their expedition in Northern and Central Africa, brought with them two heads of a species of ox, covered with their skins. These heads are the specimens which are mentioned in Messrs. Children and Vigors' accounts of the animals collected in the expedition, as belonging to the buffalo, *Bos Bubalus*, and they are stated to be called *Zamouse* by the natives; but, as no particular locality is given for the head, this name is probably the one applied to the common buffalo, which is found in most parts of North Africa.

Having some years ago compared these heads with the skull